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ABSTRACT

Although early childhood services are in high demand, there is a persistent undervaluing of the work of professionals in this field. This undervaluing results in inadequate compensation, high staff turnover, and the impairment of services. In response to these problems, the National Association for the Education of Young Children recommends the following guidelines for compensation: (1) early childhood education professionals with comparable qualifications, experience, and job responsibilities should receive comparable compensation regardless of the setting of their job; (2) compensation should be equivalent to that of other professionals with comparable preparation requirements, experience, and job responsibilities; (3) compensation should not be differentiated on the basis of the ages of children served; (4) professionals should be encouraged to seek additional preparation and should be awarded accordingly; (5) an adequate benefits package should be provided; and (6) career ladders should be established, providing additional increments in salary based on performance and participation in professional development opportunities. (SW)

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Compensation Guidelines for Early Childhood Professionals

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A position statement of the

National Association for the Education of Young Children

THE DEMAND FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD services has grown dramatically in recent years, given profound changes in family employment patterns and family composition and increasing recognition of the importance of early education. Nonetheless, there remains a persistent undervaluing of the work performed by early childhood professionals. As a result, many early childhood programs are unable to offer compensation packages sufficient to attract and retain qualified staff. When program budgets do not provide adequate compensation, children suffer the consequences. Low salaries, few benefits and difficult working conditions result in higher rates of staff turnover; research demonstrates that children enrolled in programs with high staff turnover are especially vulnerable to impairment in the critical areas of social-emotional and language development (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) believes that the lack of resources facing many early childhood programs and the concomitant inadequate compensation of early childhood personnel is rooted in this nation's chronic indifference toward young children. Such indifference is apparent in many ways. More young children—1 out of every 4 children—are in poverty than are members of any other age group, even though young children are the most vulnerable to poverty's effects. Unlike other industrialized nations with generous children's allowances, paid parental leave, and universal access to quality preschool programs, the United States offers none of the above. Despite well-documented evidence about the long-term cost-effectiveness of comprehensive, high quality, early intervention programs (Schweinhart, Barnes, Weikart, Barnett, & Epstein, 1993), only a fraction of those eligible receive needed services. Even with the recent federal expansion of assistance for child care and early education, the total need for high quality services remains far from met.

As a nation, we historically have placed less value on any type of work done for or with young children. Pediatricians earn less than other types of physicians. Kindergarten and elementary school teachers earn less than secondary school teachers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, unpublished analyses). The problems are especially pervasive among early childhood professionals employed in preschools and child care centers or self-employed as family child care providers. The National Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989) found that child care center teaching staff earned annual wages less than one-half of those paid to comparably educated women in other professions and less than one-third of those of comparably educated men.

The fact that families are expected to bear the costs of preschool and child care services with limited assistance from public and private sectors further attests to the lack of value assigned to such programs. Because low and moderate income parents are unable to afford the full cost of a quality program, the price has been depressed. What parents, even in upper income families, typically pay is far below actual cost, especially when adequate compensation is figured into the equation. Since personnel costs are the largest component of the program budget (60% or more), they are the most affected when program resources are inadequate.

As a result of the undervaluing of their work, early childhood professionals are caught in a vicious cycle. When a service is undervalued, its providers are inadequately compensated. The low compensation makes it difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff. The fact that

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little financial reward is provided to early childhood professionals who want to work with children serves as a disincentive for seeking training to enter the field or gain further professional development. Individuals who want to work with young children are often forced by economic necessity to look for higher paying jobs.

Given the importance of the early childhood years in shaping later development and learning and the increasing number of families relying on early childhood programs, it is crucial that such programs employ personnel with the knowledge and ability needed to provide good care and education for our nation's youngest citizens. While the need to provide additional public and private support to improve the affordability and quality of early childhood services has become better understood in recent years, more remains to be done. NAEYC calls for all sectors of society to further their efforts to improve the affordability and quality of early childhood services. If children are to receive the level of care and education they deserve, these efforts must rectify the inadequate compensation of program staff.

NAEYC recommends that the following guidelines be used in decisions related to the provision of compensation of early childhood professionals. It is recognized that some early childhood programs will require additional resources before these guidelines can be fully implemented; immediate steps, however, can–and must–be taken. Families alone cannot be expected to bear the additional costs. NAEYC is committed to working for strategies that acknowledge the full cost of quality early childhood program provision and that distribute this cost more equitably among all sectors of society. NAEYC believes that parents and early childhood professionals have borne a disproportionate burden in the provision of early childhood programs. All of society–children, families, employers, communities, and the nation as a whole–benefits from the provision of high quality early childhood programs. It is time that the full cost of this essential public service be shared more equitably by all sectors of society.

- **Early childhood professionals with comparable qualifications, experience, and job responsibilities should receive comparable compensation regardless of the setting of their job. This means that a teacher working in a community child care center, a family child care provider, and an elementary school teacher who hold comparable professional qualifications should also receive comparable compensation for their work.**

Early childhood professionals who work directly with young children typically are employed in a variety of settings including public schools; part-day and full-day centers, both for-profit and nonprofit; public and private prekindergarten programs, including Head Start; before- and after-school programs; and family child care. Despite the differences in setting, the nature of the job responsibilities are generally similar.

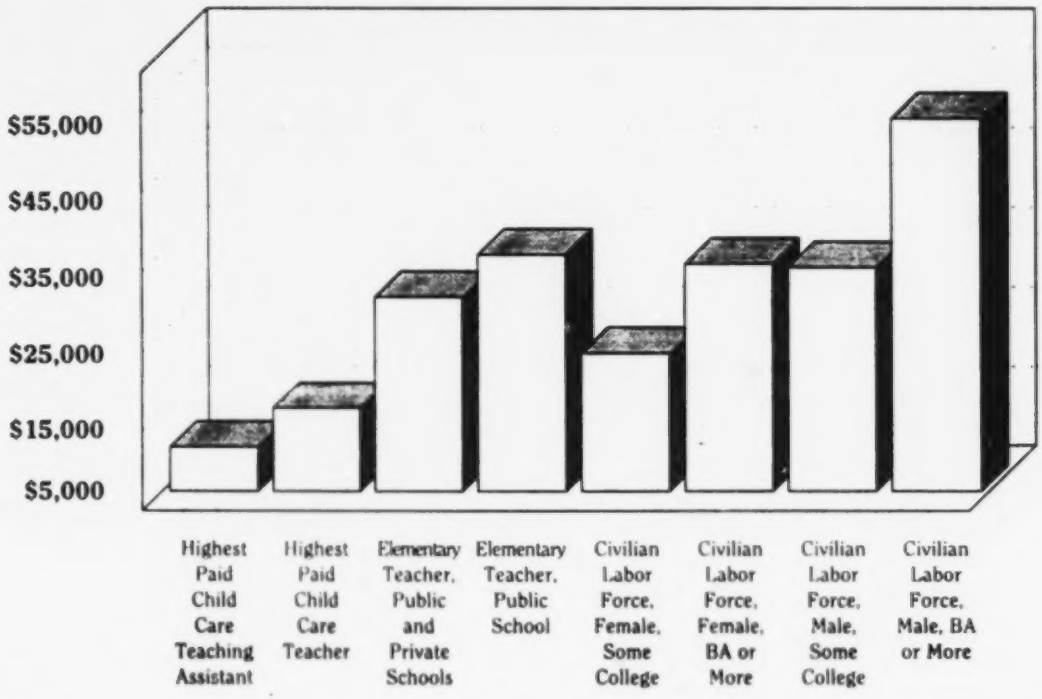
While the work of all early childhood professionals has been undervalued, those professionals working with children in situations other than serving school-age children during the traditional school-day have been the most undercompensated. For example, a national study (GAO, 1989) found that teachers in early childhood programs accredited by NAEYC earned roughly half the salary of their counterparts in public schools, holding education and experience constant. Even within the public schools, salaries have been found to be depressed for equally qualified teachers of preschool children, especially when program funding is based on parent fees or special program subsidies (Mitchell & Modigliani, 1989). As a matter of equity, early childhood professionals who have comparable qualifications and job responsibilities should also receive comparable compensation.

- **Compensation for early childhood professionals should be equivalent to that of other professionals with comparable preparation requirements, experience, and job responsibilities.**

While removing disparity within the early childhood profession is an important step forward, given the undervaluing of all work with young children, it is an insufficient goal. Early childhood salary schedules and benefits should be determined following a review of salary schedules for members of other professional groups. Reviews should be conducted within the community and when feasible, within the early childhood program's larger organizational structure.

Although an institutional review may not be feasible for small independent programs, it has proven to be an effective tool for improving compensation in many programs associated with a larger institution. The institutional review is an internal review, considering salaries and benefits provided to individuals with similar preparation and responsibilities. For example, a community service organization may compare the salaries and benefits of its early childhood teaching staff to its social workers with equivalent preparation and responsibility. A public school would examine the comparability of responsibilities and preparation and corresponding compensation for teachers in its prekindergarten and kindergarten programs to secondary teachers. The compensation of a program

Average Earnings of Teachers in Child Care Centers and Schools Compared to Average Earnings in the Civilian Labor Force by Education and Gender



Sources: Child care salaries are 1992 figures from *The National Child Care Staffing Study Revisited*, Child Care Employee Project, 1993; public school teacher salaries are 1992-93 school-year figures from the National Education Association; civilian labor force data are 1992 figures from the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

administrator in an organization such as a hospital, industry, or educational institution would be compared to the compensation package of heads of other programs or departments of similar size within that institution.

The community review, possible for all programs, should begin by considering professionals with similar responsibilities. The job responsibilities of early childhood professionals are most comparable to those of other educational professionals in elementary and secondary schools. The community review should also take into account other professionals in the community. These may include nurses, social workers, counselors, and others. Many of the social services share with the early childhood profession in the undervaluing of their work; broader comparability to more equitably paid professions should be the long-term goal.

It should be noted that family child care providers are typically not salaried employees, but are self-employed with income based on fees for service. Community reviews may provide useful information for family child care providers when determining fees. Fees should be based on the full cost of providing a high quality service and include sufficient compensation for the level of professional preparation.

- **Compensation should not be differentiated on the basis of the ages of children served.**

Assuming equivalent professional preparation and equivalent job responsibilities, early childhood professionals working with young children should receive compensation comparable to professionals working with older children. Typically, the younger the child, the lesser the value placed on the service provided. Yet, children are most vulnerable in their early years, and the impact of their early experiences on later development and learning is the most profound. Compensation provided to individuals working with young children should reflect the importance of their work.

- **Early childhood professionals should be encouraged to seek additional professional preparation and should be rewarded accordingly.**

Currently there is little incentive for early childhood personnel to seek additional training. Despite the lack of public understanding as to its importance, specialized knowledge of how young children develop and learn is the key predictor of how well early childhood personnel are able to implement a developmentally appropriate program (Bredekamp, 1989). Even when individuals understand the importance of professional development for improving the quality of early childhood services, access to continuing education is often denied due to a lack of resources.

The current crisis in recruiting and retaining qualified staff has resulted in many programs employing individuals who are underqualified for their roles and responsibilities. The provision of in-service training is especially critical in these situations so that children receive the quality of care they need. When the acquisition of additional preparation is not rewarded, there is little incentive for these individuals to remain on the job and the investment made in their in-service training is lost.

- **The provision of an adequate benefits package is a crucial component of compensation for early childhood staff.**

Early childhood personnel who are satisfied with their jobs and whose individual and family members' health is protected are more likely to convey positive feelings toward children, are more able to give utmost attention to teaching and caring for children, and are more likely to remain in their positions for longer periods of time. Benefits packages for full-time staff may be negotiated to meet individual staff members' needs but should include paid leave (annual, sick, and/or personal), medical insurance, and retirement and may provide educational benefits, subsidized child care, or other options unique to the situation. Benefits for part-time staff should be provided on a pro-rated basis. (Students or others who are placed on the job on a temporary basis for job-training purposes are excluded from this provision.)

- **Career ladders should be established, providing additional increments in salary based on performance and participation in professional development opportunities.**

Individuals who work directly with young children should be able to envision a future in this work. Too often, the only opportunity for advancement in early childhood programs requires leaving direct work with children. Career ladders that offer opportunities for advancement through merit increases and recognition of higher levels of preparation and mastery of practice promote higher quality services for children.

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Sources for further information

NAEYC has a number of resources related to quality, compensation, and affordability, including resources for its Full Cost of Quality in Early Childhood Programs campaign, including *Reaching the Full Cost of Quality in Early Childhood Programs*, B. Willer, Ed. (1991). A handbook for analyzing the true cost of quality services and determining strategies for action. NAEYC #137. $6. *The Demand and Supply of Child Care in 1990.* B. Willer, S.L. Hofferth, E.E. Kisker, P. Divine-Hawkins, E. Farquhar, & F.B. Glantz. (1991). National data on child care from the perspective of parents and program providers. NAEYC #136. $6. Purchase these resources by contacting NAEYC at 1509 16th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036-1426; call 202-232-8777 or 800-424-2460.

The National Center for the Early Childhood Work Force (formerly the Child Care Employee Project) is a national policy, advocacy, and research organization focusing exclusively on enhancing the compensation, status, and training of the early childhood work force. The Center also coordinates the national Worthy Wage campaign. For further information, contact the Center at 6536 Telegraph Avenue, Suite A-201, Oakland, CA 94609; call 510-653-9889.

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